



U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement

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# News Release

## **WOMAN SENTENCED TO 46 MONTHS IN PRISON FOR PASSPORT FRAUD, ALIEN SMUGGLING**

CHICAGO — A member of an international alien smuggling organization was sentenced to 46 months in prison for her role in smuggling hundreds of illegal aliens into the United States using fraudulent U.S. passports, following an investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Carmen M. Hernandez, 43, a U.S. citizen, was sentenced Thursday by U.S. District Court Judge Milton I. Shadur for conspiracy to fraudulently obtain United States passports to smuggle South Americans into the U.S. for financial gain.

Hernandez and her organization recruited U.S. citizens to apply for U.S. passports using photographs of illegal aliens from South America – mostly children from Ecuador – for fees of \$12,000 to \$14,000 each. Once the U.S. citizen agreed to assist in fraudulently obtaining the U.S. passport, they would be provided with a photo of an undocumented alien to submit with the passport application. The U.S. citizen would be paid \$300 to \$500 to turn the passport over to the alien smuggling organization. Smuggling organizers in New York then collected payment from the family members of the smuggled alien. Smuggling fees were paid and illicit proceeds were distributed between the conspirators via wire transfers and cash transactions.

“Human smuggling is a profitable criminal enterprise for the smuggler and a dangerous one for those being smuggled,” said ICE Special Agent-in-Charge Elissa Brown. “Alien smuggling poses a serious threat to our national security. The 9/11 Commission identified that fraudulent documents are the primary tools of terrorists and criminals that enable them to cover their tracks and move freely from place to place. Consequently, ICE has no tolerance for anyone making, selling, providing, or using fraudulent documents.” Brown leads the ICE Chicago Office of Investigations.

Hernandez and her co-conspirators were the targets of a two-year joint investigation conducted by ICE, the U.S. Attorney's Office, the State Department's Bureau of Diplomatic Security, and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service.

The investigation began Jan. 7, 2003 into an alien smuggling organization dedicated to illegally recruiting, transporting, harboring and smuggling hundreds of illegal aliens from Ecuador and South America into the United States.

Hernandez is the fourth of seven individuals to be sentenced in this case.

# ICE #

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.*